

Oakland resident Violet Henderson, who shared her personal story of overcoming poverty. After leaving, unfortunately, the criminal justice system, after being paroled, she told her story. She is a phenomenal individual who is raising her two children and is a student. She succeeded against overwhelming odds. Her story is a powerful example of resilience and dedication, which so many struggling Americans have.

It should be a call to action for Members of Congress to help more people like Violet by supporting policies that will end poverty. Yet our Republican colleagues continue to promote harmful cuts to critical safety net programs despite knowing that these cuts will push more families over the edge; and the record of the members on Speaker RYAN's so-called Task Force on Poverty, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility are just as bad, if not worse. Time and time again, they have voted to cut SNAP, to erode higher education funding and Pell Grants, and to weaken affordable housing programs.

Mr. Speaker, I insert in the RECORD Violet Henderson's testimony.

TESTIMONY OF VIOLET HENDERSON AT HOUSE DEMOCRATIC STEERING AND POLICY COMMITTEE HEARING: "THE FAILURE OF TRICKLE DOWN ECONOMICS IN THE WAR ON POVERTY," APRIL 14, 2016

Thank you Leader Pelosi, Congresswoman DeLauro, Congresswoman Edwards, and Whip Hoyer. Thank you to the other panelists up here with me. And I want to give a special thank-you to my Congresswoman, Congresswoman Barbara Lee. I'm here today because of you, Congresswoman Lee, both because you invited me to this hearing, but in a bigger sense, your leadership in Oakland and support of good reentry and economic policies has made it possible for me to escape poverty and live a life I am proud of and talk to you about today.

I am honored to be here, and grateful that you have given me the opportunity to speak about these issues. I am a worker, a mother, a grandmother, a formerly incarcerated person, a churchgoer, and a student.

I can speak only for myself but I hope that my testimony today can give voice to the millions of people who, like me, got caught up in the criminal justice system, worked incredibly hard to transform their lives, but still face lifelong stumbling blocks to financial stability. Unlike me, too many people who worked have never escaped poverty despite their hard work.

For me, like so many, the challenges started with childhood poverty. My father died when I was four years old. My mother had seven children to care for on her own and she really struggled. I grew up in the Aliso Village housing project in East Los Angeles. I never remember, as a child, having hope or vision about a bright future.

My "escape" came when I was fourteen years old. My 21-year-old boyfriend took me to Oakland and made me work the streets. At the time, I did not have the privilege of believing that I deserved more and better for my life. I was first arrested for when I was sixteen years old but I was not seen as the victim of sex trafficking. I was treated like a criminal. And I became one. My next boyfriend, who was 25 years older than I was, taught me how to become a thief. When I was 19 years old I was sent to prison for grand theft and conspiracy of several hundred dollars in a street scam.

Because I was a high school dropout, I got my G.E.D. while I was in prison, and afterward I took college-level classes. For the first time in my life I was exposed to learning, and I loved it. While in prison I met a mother and a daughter who were incarcerated at the same time. This broke my heart because the daughter had a child whom she missed dearly and tried to escape from prison to get back to her child. The moment I heard that the daughter tried to escape, I made a decision to change my life. I wanted children but I was going to put them through that. I have never looked back.

Once I got out, I had two wonderful children and dedicated myself to supporting them. I worked full-time as a cosmetologist but still did not earn enough to feed my family. For a while we survived because we had access to food stamps, which we needed even when I was working multiple full-time jobs. Then, thanks to an affirmative action program, I was able to join the local Laborers Union and I worked heavy construction for the next 20 years. It was hard physical labor but I was grateful for the opportunity because I earned more money than I had ever earned at any other job. It allowed me, as a single parent, to provide for my children, though we still struggled.

Working as a laborer became more and more difficult as I grew older and I looked for other work. When I was 54 years old I was denied office jobs because of my convictions, which were then 30 years old. Thanks to free reentry clean slate legal services—which Congresswoman Barbara Lee helped start in Oakland at the East Bay Community Law Center—I was able to clean up my record, and as a result I was able to get a great job, and thankfully one that this sixty-one-year-old body can handle. I'm coordinating the environmental/waste reduction program for a large city agency. It has been an inspiring and wonderful opportunity. I was even able to fulfill my life-long dream of becoming a homeowner and I bought a condo in Oakland.

A few years back I enrolled in a community college in Oakland to study Environmental Management, where I take night and evening classes. I have surprised myself by earning a 3.92 GPA, and was even more surprised when I was recently invited to transfer to the University of California at Berkeley.

But—and this is why we are here today—despite my successes, and despite working as hard as a person can work, I have worried constantly about keeping my head above water financially. I have had stable employment, and I have catapulted myself out of the deep poverty my family knew when I was a child. BUT still, even now, I can't say that I have feel economically secure. I struggled mightily to hold onto my condo through the economic recession. I am 61 years old and worried about being able to retire anytime soon.

I don't exactly know how to define "middle class" but it can't mean what I have done for the last 3 decades of my life: Working full time, being very frugal, but yet also constantly worrying about meeting my basic financial obligations and the threat of eviction. And I am someone who has been exceptionally lucky in terms of the abundance of learning and employment opportunities I have had! I cannot imagine the financial burdens of people who have been less fortunate or live in areas with fewer programs.

My plea today is that you work for policies that reward all hard working people in America with a fair chance to support their families. This is the challenge my children face even though both of them are resourceful, intelligent, and have good jobs. I pray that my children will be able to know economic prosperity, which at very least means

living without constant worry about day-to-day about making it.

I sit before you as a very different person from who I was as lost and hopeless 16-year-old girl on the streets. It has been a long journey of seeking forgiveness for the harm I caused others, and healing myself I hope my story can inspire women who are now struggling on the path I was on thirty years ago. I want them to be encouraged to persevere and make positive changes in their lives, and to have faith in the system. But the system must also have faith in us! Successful reentry requires government policies and programs that remove stumbling blocks to economic security.

I am exceptionally grateful to be here but I am not exceptional. I am an example of what's possible when we support people through smart and fair reentry and economic programs.

Thank you.

THE BUDGET AND THE ZIKA VIRUS

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, this morning, I had the privilege of participating with the Union Theological Center, in New York, to speak about our faith and our legislation. It causes me to come to the floor today to act upon that very strong faith in the Good Samaritan, which means that we are, in effect, our brothers' and sisters' keeper.

We have a devastating disease in the Zika virus that has now been announced as being more devastating than had been expected as it causes severe brain damage; and my State and Gulf States and other States across America are, in fact, in the target line. In Texas, for example, we recently had a Zika virus hearing, and our infectious disease experts told us that this is a devastating disease.

Yes, we can take money from someplace else and borrow from Peter to pay Paul, but I am asking this Congress, in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, to pass the President's emergency supplemental request of \$1.9 billion. I will be asking the Secretary of Health and Human Services to come to Texas and sit down with our law enforcement and health professionals in order to make a difference.

Finally, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that this is budget day, and we have not passed a budget. We will not pass a Republican budget because it kills education; it doesn't protect Social Security; and it is not in the spirit of a Good Samaritan. Let us do what is right—pass a budget for the American people and provide for those in the line of danger with the Zika virus.

MISSED BUDGET DEADLINE

(Mr. VEASEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. VEASEY. Mr. Speaker, there is something important for the American people to know: today is the day, April